

## Current issues in special education and reading instruction

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he issues discussed by the contributors to this installment of *RRQ's* New Directions in Research clearly establish that special education and reading is a particularly timely topic. The field of special education is confronting fundamental changes in how it defines and identifies its constituency; how those changes relate to theory, practice, and policy; and the precise role of special education in furthering learning and instruction. From a historical perspective, difficulty in learning to read has been perhaps the most prominent manifestation of the learning difficulties that occupy the attention of those in the field of special education. Obviously, too, reading is the most common point of contact between literacy and special education researchers, and it has not been unusual that these two research communities view learning to read much differently. Thus, the current changes in the way special education is viewed are likely to have important implications for the relation between literacy researchers and special education researchers.

Understandably, as thoughtful scholars who have diverse perspectives and who are writing on the cusp of a major shift in perspective, the contributors to this NDR raise more questions than they answer, both within and across their respective pieces. For example, what is most fundamental to special education's efforts in the area of reading? The etiology of reading difficulties? Theory, and should relevant theory focus on factors internal or external to a reader? Determining the most effective models of instruction? Further, how do special educators explain and deal with the disproportionate number of minorities assigned to special education programs? Contributors to this NDR speak to these and similarly difficult questions at a particularly interesting junction in the history of special education and reading. If they do not answer these questions definitively, they substantively extend the dialogue and clearly suggest new questions and avenues for research.

Each piece has something important to say, and we encourage readers to read all the pieces as an integrated set. To facilitate that integration we ordered the pieces purposefully. For example, Douglas Fuchs and Lynn Fuchs's piece is first because it provides a detailed explanation of Response to Intervention (RTI), a key development in special education that occupies a good deal of attention in the

pieces that follow. They also provide a framework for subsequent pieces by Russell Gersten and Joseph Dimino and by Janette Klingner and Patricia Edwards. John McEneaney, Mary Lose, and Robert

Schwartz were placed last because these authors' entry, more than the others, connects its points to the other three pieces, and thus serves as a capstone to the entire set.

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